



BLM - ALASKA

FRONTIERS

News about BLM-managed
public lands in Alaska

ISSUE 85 SPRING 2002

New visitor center will serve as gateway to the North Slope

This year's spring breakup in Coldfoot will bring more than the usual muddy vehicles, swollen rivers, and early, winter-dazed mosquitoes. In May, construction will begin on the new Arctic Inter-agency Visitor Center, a cooperative project involving BLM, the National Park Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The three agencies will use the new visitor center to serve visitors traveling the Dalton Highway, an increasingly popular tourist route into northern Alaska. Coldfoot, located in the Brooks Range roughly halfway between Fairbanks and Deadhorse, is a common overnight stop for travelers on the highway.

Last fall, firefighters from the Alaska Fire Service cleared trees and brush from the building site so this spring's construction could begin as soon as the snow melts. Firefighters also protected the site from wildfires by thinning and removing trees in the surrounding forest.

Lenore Heppler, project manager for the design and construc-



Artist rendition of the new interagency visitor center at Coldfoot. A ground-breaking ceremony is scheduled for late May and the center will open for the 2003 visitor season.

tion of the new visitor center, has firsthand experience with the existing facility's cramped quarters. She is excited about the expanded capabilities the new center will bring.

"The old center just wasn't big enough and sometimes we had to turn people away," Heppler says. "Now we'll have a new facility that can handle the big crowds when tour buses and other large groups come through. We'll also have actual toilets, which I'm sure our visitors will appreciate!"

The new facility will allow the staff to update and improve the center's interpretive exhibits about the region's natural and human history.

"We'll have a lot more space for
-continued on next page

Breaking news...

BLM-Alaska State Director Fran Cherry promoted to Washnigton, Henri Bisson named as replacement. Details on page 11.

Also in this issue...

- BLM national director visits Alaska 2
- Olympics wrap-up 3
- Denali Highway goes to the dogs 6
- Colville River plan delayed 9
- Fire planned in Alphabet Hills 11

Coldfoot, *continued from page 1*

exhibits to help people understand what they're seeing as they travel along the highway," Heppler says.

One of the project's biggest challenges was designing a building that could 'go cold.' In other words, the building will remain completely unheated during Coldfoot's long winters. This design will save the visitor center's funding agencies the considerable expense of heating, staffing, and maintaining the remote facility during the winter months, when very few visitors pass through Coldfoot.

But it also meant designing a building interior that could survive some of the coldest temperatures in North America. The United States' lowest temperature on record, an astounding -80 degrees Fahrenheit, was measured in 1971 at Prospect Creek, 40 miles south of Coldfoot. Br-r-r-r-r.

Fortunately Coldfoot's summer visitors will be more likely to find temperatures closer to 80 degrees above.

"You have to assume that everything is going to move, to expand and contract with the temperature changes," says Rodd Moretz, BLM's design engineer for the project. "The foundation, the utilities, the plumbing—it's all designed with that in mind."

BLM expects construction to be completed by January 2003. The exhibits, which are already designed, should be fabricated and installed in time for 2003 tourist season.

—Craig McCaa
BLM Northern Field Office

Coming in the August issue...

A complete report on the
NPRA lease sale scheduled
for June 3.

BLM national director Kathleen Clarke visits Alaska



Edward Bovy

BLM Director Kathleen Clarke, joined by BLM-Alaska State Director Fran Cherry and Special Assistant to the Secretary Cam Toohey, toured the Hunter prospect in NPR-A to see the latest drilling technology operating.

BLM's new national director, Kathleen Clarke, was sworn into office in December and wasted no time coming to Alaska just two months later. Alaska was very high on her priority list as the state will play a key role in the president's national energy strategy.

Clarke gave a hint of her management style and hopes for the BLM at meeting with BLM employees in Anchorage and Fairbanks stating, "We should be creative in our problem solving. I want our employees to think outside the box."

While in Anchorage she toured the Joint Pipeline Office, the Campbell Creek Science Center and saw the ceremonial start of the Iditarod. Then it was off to Fairbanks for additional employee meetings and a tour of the Alaska Fire Service.

All this was just a warmup to the highlight of the trip, a visit to the north slope. In Barrow she listened to the concerns expressed by community leaders at a special breakfast in Barrow and toured the Inupiat Heritage Center.

Finally she reached Alaska's energy frontier: NPR-A. Clarke, along with special assistant to the secretary of interior Cam Toohey and BLM Alaska State Director Fran Cherry, visited the Hunter drill site and were briefed on the winter exploration program by geologists from Phillips Alaska.

The Hunter site is somewhat unique. While other drill sites have been constructed and supported by the use of ice roads built from the east of NPR-A, Hunter is so far to the west that ice roads would not be practical. Instead, the Hunter drill rig and support facilities were hauled in modules by special low impact vehicles, overland across the frozen tundra. More than 150 trips were required. The process was reversed at the end of the drilling season and only a single pipe poking up from the ground will be evident this summer.

Clarke's trip also included flying over the Native village of Nuiqsut on the edge of the NPR-A enroute to a brief stopover at the Alpine facility where she could see what a north slope oil field in full production would look like.

*BLM-Alaska helps out behind the scenes
of the world's greatest sporting spectacle*

The Fire Within

(and the cold outside!)



"The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win, but to take part..."

If Baron de Coubertin's articulation of the Olympic Creed is any indication, the 2002 Olympics were a resounding success—more than 30,000 volunteers were mobilized to assist in the safe and efficient conduct of the games. Here are the stories behind a few of those volunteers...

The world was waiting...and excited about seeing the world's finest athletes compete. But at the same time people were concerned about the threat of terrorism. Would the 2002 Winter Olympics be safe for participants? Spectators? Residents of the Salt Lake City area?

Almost as soon as Salt Lake City was selected to host the Olympics, the United States Secret Service began considering security arrangements. Then, in the wake of the events of September 11, 2001, the need for adequate security grew even more urgent. A vast cadre of federal, state, and local law enforcement professionals were recruited to form an elite security force.

Among the two dozen or so BLM law enforcement rangers enlisted were Dave Stimson of the Anchorage Field Office, Rohn Nelson of the Glennallen Field Office and Bob Posey, formerly of both the Glennallen and Northern field offices. (Posey is currently a special agent in Nevada.) The BLM contingent was assigned to the Soldier Hollow venue in Wasatch State Park where the

Nordic ski and biathlon competitions were held.



K. J. Mushovic

The Fire Within *cont'd*

BLM goes behind the scenes at the Olympics



"I really believe that the mission was successful in providing a deterrent factor, and was definitely worthwhile," said Stimson as he reflected on his stint in Utah. "We never really had a serious problem with

unauthorized access at Soldier Hollow. There were a few incidents with foreign media members who may have had trouble understanding and complying with security measures, but it was actually probably one of the most secure venues."

Stimson and Nelson left Alaska several days prior to the opening ceremonies to get their equipment, orientation, and training. Assignments within Soldier Hollow varied daily, but usually included snowmachine patrols or visually monitoring sectors of the venue. Windowed warmup huts, about the size of old-fashioned telephone booths, afforded periodic respite from the weather. The uniform components were of good quality, but the Alaska rangers were probably among the best-prepared volunteers for the unseasonable cold.

"My suitcase must have weighed a hundred pounds," recalls Nelson. "I took the warmest gear I own and was glad to have it."

The pair also had the advantage of familiarity with snowmachines. "There was a treasury department employee from Miami who crashed his snowmachine into a tree on the very first day," noted Stimson, shaking his head.

Because they were pulling twelve hour shifts, seven days a week, neither was able to enjoy the

Nancy Reagan, Alaska DOT



K. J. Mushovic answers questions while on duty at the Utah Media Center.

events as spectators, although they did manage to catch glimpses—even if from afar, through binoculars!

Despite the long time away from their families and the plague of sleep deprivation, most law enforcement personnel would likely re-enlist if given the chance. As Nelson pointed out, "I have to say, this assignment was one of the highlights of my career."

BLM partnered with the National Park Service, Forest Service, and Utah State Parks to form America's Public Lands Coalition, charged with providing public lands information booths at media centers in downtown Salt Lake City and Park City. The mission of the media centers was to encourage pride and personal stewardship in public lands. Information available at the media centers ranged from "how to" and "who to contact" to obtain commercial film permits from the agencies as well as maps, brochures, DVDs, CDs and video tapes of the public lands.

BLM's ultimate weapon was a small stash of trading pins. The pins generated media center foot traffic and interest in a big way; the pins could not be purchased and were prized by both casual collectors and those gripped by the frenzy of pin trading associated with the Olympics.

Security at the media centers was tight—possibly even tighter than at the venues or the Salt Lake City airport—with



K. J. Mushovic





BLM Ranger Dave Stimson ventures out from one of the warm up huts located around the ski venue at Soldier Hollow.

access strictly limited to those who had undergone background checks and who had proper credentials.

At the popular “Living Legends” exhibit, wild horses and burros that had been gathered from public lands were available for viewing at the Western Experience area. The animals were probably the most intriguing and popular point of contact for both the media and the public. If you noticed any features about wild horses and burros in the news during the past few months, it was very likely the result the Living Legends exhibit.



The Utah Olympic Media Center (UMC) overlooked the heart of the Olympics—Salt Lake Olympic Square, adjacent to the Olympic Medals Plaza and site of each evening’s award ceremonies. Many of the buildings in the core downtown area sported “wraps” depicting athletes in various events. Nearly every street corner served as a defacto pin trading center. While crowds thronged through the plaza below, the media center buzzed with its own intensity as reporters and writers hunched over banks of computers to research and file stories, attended press conferences, and spirited away athletes for film interviews. Perhaps staffing a booth at the UMC was not as exciting as attending an Olympic event, but it was certainly a once-in-a-career break from routine assignments for a cadre of BLM public affairs staff from around the country. And, of course, there was the opportunity to experience the Olympic atmosphere after work!

—K. J. Mushovic
Glennallen Field Office

Ranger Dave Stimson conducted patrols and traveled between assigned duty stations in Soldier Hollow via snowmachine.



Photo courtesy Dave Stimson

One Last Secret?

UAF student hopes historic mine may aid in cleaning up public lands

On a cloudless March day, geologist John Clark and his assistant Dave Esse patiently maneuver their snowmachines through dense willows engulfing an access road at the historic Hi Yu Mine near Fairbanks.

Clark was after water samples for a research project. He knows finding water can be a tough task after a long Fairbanks winter has frozen everything in sight.

After parking their snowmachines in a sunny opening in the willows, Clark and Esse drag an aluminum sled full of sampling gear onto a frozen pond. The pond started as one of the mine's tailings impoundments, but years later, after its dam breached during a flood, beavers repaired and claimed it for their own use.

Soon a chugging ice auger broke the morning stillness. Clark and Esse wrestle the bucking machine through the pond's thick ice, pausing to mount additional auger sections as the hole deepened.

The Hi Yu's glory days

Discovered in 1912, the Hi Yu was the second largest lode gold producer in the Fairbanks mining district until World War II temporarily shut down gold mining. The underground mine didn't reopen after the war but the five-stamp mill occasionally processed ore from other mines.

The Hi Yu Mine enjoyed a brief renaissance in the late 1980s when a local mining company recovered additional gold by using more modern technology.

After that project ended, the remaining tailings were left undisturbed on a flat meadow below the mill. Normally such an area would

become a jungle; the Interior's long, summer daylight allows even the most forlorn patch of dirt to sprout willows like a Chia pet on Miracle-Gro. But that didn't happen here. Only a few scrawny willows and a cracked, bald tire punctuate the lumpy expanse of sandy, tan tailings.

Several years ago the strangely barren tailings caught the attention of Northern Field Office mining specialist Steven Lundeen, who inspects the site several times a year as part of BLM's abandoned mine land program.

"Thirteen years and no willows," Lundeen noted on one of his visits. "We definitely should have seen some willows coming in by now."

Lundeen began collecting water samples from a seep below the mill building and from nearby streams to see if runoff from the mine or surrounding land might be contributing contaminants to local streams.

More than a job - a master's thesis!

Last year Lundeen found help with the water sampling from John Clark, who is working on a master's degree in geochemistry at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. Clark is taking on the Hi Yu Mine as a research project while working part-time for BLM through the Student Temporary Employment Program. Using a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Geological Survey, Lundeen and Clark are tapping into some of the best expertise available in the fields of geochemistry and water quality.

"This is working out great," Lundeen says. "With John taking care of the sampling, I have time to

deal with some of the other abandoned mine land issues at this site."

Clark's project involves finding the source of elevated levels of metals (primarily zinc, cadmium, and antimony) that both BLM and the U.S. Geological Survey have measured in the streams below the site. These metals can be toxic to fish at very low levels and may be coming from the tailings, from water draining from collapsed mine openings, or even from nearby, undisturbed mineralized areas.

To understand the seasonal dynamics of the drainage area, Clark collects water samples year-round. Fairbanks' frigid winter

Craig McCaa



Geologist John Clark watches as fisheries biologist Dave Esse (right) lowers a sediment sampler down an auger hole on a frozen pond at the Hi Yu mine.



Craig McCaa

The mill building of the historic Hi Yu mine.

temperatures cause some small streams to freeze solid while others keep flowing. This can alter the chemistry of the water draining from the area. Clark also tries to collect samples during both high and low stream levels.

The Hi-Yu Mine's proximity to Fairbanks is a distinct advantage for this kind of study, Clark says. With many of Alaska's mines accessible only by costly plane or helicopter rides, sampling costs can quickly become prohibitively expensive.

Deeper down the hole

But collecting water samples is hard without water, and on this day he and Esse hadn't yet found anything but ice.

The two men push the auger deeper as a pile of ice chips grow at their feet. With only one auger section left, Clark and Esse finally

break through the ice. To their relief a wave of gray slush surged out of the hole and wash over their bunny boots. Clark turns to assemble his sampling equipment, a jumble of plastic bottles, labels, and electronic instruments.

While Esse takes notes, Clark kneels down and submerges a neoprene-clad arm into the chilly water to fill several plastic sample bottles. Next he lowers an electronic probe into the hole. The probe measures temperature, conductivity, and pH.

After a short snowmachine ride up the valley, he and Esse repeat the same procedure at a shallow ditch in the shadow of the dilapidated mill. Here they find water on the surface seeping from a narrow cleft in the snow.

The samples that Clark carefully packs onto his snow-machine will be analyzed at laboratories of the U.S. Geological Survey in

Denver.

Clark hopes this project will not only reveal the source of metals in the streams below the Hi Yu Mine but also identify what happens to these metals once they enter the streams.

In addition to explaining what is happening at the Hi Yu Mine, Clark's project may have broader applications for researchers studying mining-related water quality problems.

"It's an interesting site and a good place to evaluate sampling techniques that may be useful at other abandoned mine sites," he says. "I want results that will be helpful for others."

—Craig McCaa

BLM asks public for ideas for managing Gulkana River

In late April and early May, the BLM's Glennallen Field Office conducted a series of public meetings in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Glennallen to discuss potential alternatives for managing the Gulkana River.

These draft alternatives were developed through scoping meetings held in 1998 and 1999, informal consultation with stakeholders, interagency coordination, and the results of river user surveys conducted in late 1999. The draft alternatives take into consideration a wide range of potential management strategies for the various segments of the river, as well as different times of the summer season.

Meeting attendees were encouraged to ask questions and provide feedback on site, but comments will be accepted through mid-June.

A draft plan will be made available for public comment in October, 2002.

For further information about the progress of the Gulkana River planning studies, visit the website, located on a link from the Glennallen Field Office web page at www.glennallen.ak.blm.gov, or contact Bruce Rogers at 822-3217.



K.J. Mushovic

Gulkana River management alternatives were on display at meetings in Anchorage, Fairbanks and Glennallen.

Fish monitoring project in jeopardy

In other Gulkana River news, a challenge cost share project to construct a fish counting tower involving the Glennallen Field Office and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game has been jeopardized by an appeal and petition for stay filed by American Rivers, Inc. At press time, both agencies were researching ways to continue the project.

BLM to delay Colville River plan

BLM will delay the development of the Colville River Special Area Multiple Use Activity Plan until it completes ongoing planning for the northwest portion of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A).

The agency's decision came partly in response to public comment letters, according to Bob Schneider, BLM's Northern Field Office Manager. He said a number of people requested that the agency delay the plan until the Colville River could be addressed on a watershed basis, rather than as separate planning areas.

The agency now plans to incorporate the Colville plan into a comprehensive plan for the southern portion of the NPR-A. BLM altered the boundaries for that planning area so that it contains nearly all of the Colville River watershed not currently covered

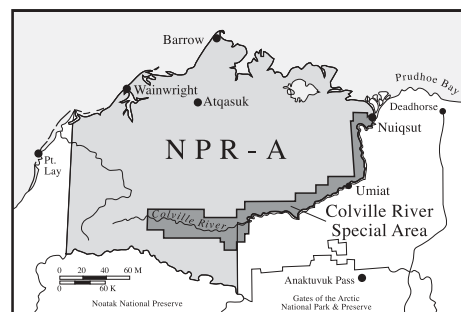
by a comprehensive plan.

"Now we can take a watershed approach to planning for the Colville River, rather than constraining ourselves only to those portions of the river within the Special Area's boundaries," Schneider said.

The delay and revised boundaries for the NPR-A South plan will also help BLM better address important resource issues such as wilderness and wild and scenic rivers, he said.

The lower part of the Colville River watershed will remain covered by the ongoing NPR-A Northwest plan, due to be completed in 2003. "The NPR-A Northwest plan was already far enough along that we didn't want to delay it by removing additional areas," Schneider said.

Field work will continue on the



Colville River this summer. BLM specialists will collect data related to wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, recreation, archaeology, paleontology, wildlife, and subsistence resources.

BLM maintains a mailing list of those interested in the Colville River planning effort. Anyone interested in being placed on the list is encouraged to write to: Bureau of Land Management, Northern Field Office, Attn. Gary Foreman, 1150 University Avenue, Fairbanks, AK 99709.

Denali Highway goes to the dogs

New race designed to train novices for competitive races throughout Alaska

It took him more than three days, but Kelly LeMarre of Willow held on to his early lead and was the first musher to reach the Cantwell finish line of the Denali 300 sled dog trial in late March.

Conceived in 2000 by mushers Mark Lindstrom and Dimitri Gianakopoulos, the event is better described as a training opportunity for amateur mushers rather than a race, but nevertheless serves as a recognized qualifier for both the Iditarod and the Yukon Quest.

Utilizing the snow-covered Denali Highway, the Denali 300, like most rural Alaska dog sled-ding events, relies entirely on volunteers. Lindstrom continued to serve as race marshal this year while Gianakopoulos held the post of race manager. Seasoned mushers, veterinarians, and experienced sled dog race volunteers were on hand along the route to offer advice and assistance when needed. Denali Highway lodges were utilized as check-points. Road access for fans was available both at the Cantwell start/finish line and the mandatory layover point on the Huffman Field airstrip in Paxson.

To ensure that participants in this no-purse event received adequate support, registration was limited to only 30 mushers. Organizers scheduled the start and finish during the week to minimize the potential for snowmachine/musher conflicts. Impacts to wildlife and the environment were minimized through stipulations associated with the authorization issued by the Glennallen Field Office.

—K. J. Mushovic
Glennallen Field Office



The new Denali 300 will train a new generation of mushers for the larger events like the Copper Basin 300, the Yukon Quest, and of course, the Iditarod. Even though the race was small by comparison, air logists played a role.



Does your event require a special recreation permit? Check with your local Bureau of Land Management office to be sure!



Frontier Flashes

NEWS FROM AROUND ALASKA

Thompson Pass heli-ski permits issued for 2002; controversy expected to continue next season

The last issue of *Alaska Frontiers* included an article describing the public process used by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Glennallen Field Office in its determination that pending proposals for commercial heli-ski operations, as well as a competitive event and snowcat-supported skiing should be authorized on BLM managed public lands in the Thompson Pass area.

Just after our last press deadline, the Alaska Center for the Environment, the Copper Country Alliance, the Wilderness Society, and two individuals appealed BLM's decision to issue permits to the applicants. The group of appellants also filed petition for stay, which requested that the Department of Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA) prevent BLM from authorizing any of the applications until the IBLA issued a decision on the appeal (a legal review process that can take a year or more).

BLM's attorneys opposed the request for stay and asked the IBLA to expedite its ruling. IBLA did not make a decision regarding the petition within its administrative timeframe, allowing BLM to implement its original decision.



Dave Mushovic

Thompson Pass, about 30 miles north of Valdez, has been the focus of increased winter recreation. Applications for the 2003 season will be due in mid-July this year.

Each of the five heli-ski operations and one competitive event were granted special recreation permits. In early May, the petition for stay was formally denied by the IBLA, although a decision on the appeal itself is still pending.

A public meeting was held in Valdez on May 16th to gather information related to the presence of helicopter supported activities and the experiences of other users of the area. If you were unable to attend that meeting and have comments, questions or concerns, or wish to be included on the mailing list for updates on Thompson Pass issues, please contact KJ Mushovic at the Glennallen Field Office, Box 147, Glennallen, Alaska 99588, at 822-3217, or K_J_Mushovic@ak.blm.gov.

ATV Workshop Held

An Alaska All-Terrain Vehicle and Snowmachine Summit and Management Workshop was held in Anchorage, April 2-5 which brought federal and state agencies, industry and special interest groups together to tackle ATV issues.

Objectives included defining agency, public and industry stakeholder concerns and developing an collaborative approach in response to issues.

The summit and workshop was a cooperative effort of the BLM, National Park Service, State of Alaska, the National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council and others. The summary of summit/workshop is almost complete which includes a listing of attendees, committee action reports and group action reports.

For more information contact Bill Overbaugh at 907.271.5508. Ken Baehr at 907.257.2652 or ken_baehr@partner.nps.gov.

Prescribed fire planned for Alphabet Hills

BLM's Glennallen Office, working with the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the Alaska Fire Service, is planning a prescribed burn within the Alphabet Hills, south of the Maclaren River and north of Lake Louise. The burn is intended to restore diversity to the vegetation in the area and to improve winter moose habitat. The fire will affect 28,000 to 39,000 acres of public land and can occur as early as June 15 if weather and other conditions allow for a safe burn. The communities of Lake Louise, Glennallen, Paxson, and along the Glenn, Richardson and Denali highways, may experience smokey conditions depending on the weather.

Private property left or stored on public lands without proper authorization is solely the responsibility of its owner(s) and, if present, should be removed prior to the burn. For additional information, contact John Rego of the Glennallen Field Office at 822-3217.

BLM consults public on plans for improving vegetation

On March 6, a meeting was held in Anchorage seeking issues and opinions from the public on BLM's options to treat and restore vegetation on public land. Public input will guide the development of the environmental impact statement (EIS) *Vegetation Treatments, Watershed and Wildlife Habitats on Public Lands Administered by the BLM in the Western United States, Including Alaska*.

BLM is undertaking the EIS to review restoration activities and to identify and address alternatives for restoration of soil surfaces, watershed functions, habitats, natural fire regimes and invasive noxious weeds. In Alaska, forest fuels reduction will be the prominent vegetation treatment. About six million acres of public land could be treated nationwide each year with Alaska treating about 10 percent of those acres per year. The analysis area includes the surface estate BLM administers in the western U.S. and Alaska.

The EIS will update and replace analyses contained in four existing vegetation treatment EISs completed from 1986 to 1992. It will also analyze treatments on BLM-administered lands in Alaska not included in earlier EISs.



Jeff Kowalczyk, an outdoor recreation planner in BLM's Tok Field Station, tests a youngsters' knowledge of Alaska wildlife during the Great Alaska Sportsman Show in April. Kowalczyk built a "Wheel of Natural Resources" patterned after a popular game show. The wheel is very popular with children and adults alike and the Tok office often lends it to other federal agencies. This spring the wheel also made an appearance at the outdoors show in Fairbanks.

Frontier People

Cherry moves up to #2 in Washington Bisson named #1 in BLM-Alaska



Fran Cherry

BLM-Alaska State Director **Fran Cherry** has been promoted to deputy director for operations in the BLM's national office in Washington, D. C. He will report directly to national director Kathleen Clarke and is now responsible for the day-to-day operations of the bureau. Cherry, a 33-year BLM veteran, has been BLM's Alaska state director since May 1999.



Henri Bisson

Henri Bisson will be the new Alaska state director and will be transferring from Washington D. C. where he has been the bureau's assistant director of renewable resources and planning. Bisson's BLM career spans 25 years and includes management positions in California, Arizona and Colorado. Bisson worked on Alaska program and budget issues during a previous tour of duty in the Washington Office and in 1983 served as an intern to Congressman Don Young.

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**Bureau of Land Management
Office of External Affairs
222 W. 7th Avenue #13
Anchorage, Alaska 99513**

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

Managing editor:
Edward Bovy, (907) 271-5555

Contributing writers:
Danielle Allen
Craig McCaa
Teresa McPherson
K. J. Mushovic

Cartography:
Carol Belenski

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